DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 329 CS 206 352

AUTHOR Ducey, Rick; Reagan, Joey
TITLE Sources for State Government News.
PUB DATE Aug 81
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (64th, East Lansing, MI, August 8-11, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Information Sources; Mass Media; *Media Research; News Media; *Newspapers; *News Reporting; *State Government; Surveys; *Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS Media Role; *News Sources

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the sources used by a metropolitan population for news about state government. Telephone interviews were conducted with 714 adult subjects in a metropolitan area in Michigan. Subjects were asked how much time they spent reading newspapers and watching television, how interested they were in state government, and their main source for news about state government, as well as demographic questions. The results indicated that the subjects viewed television an average of three hours and read newspapers an average of 52 minutes each day. Forty-seven percent of the subjects said they were interested in state government news, and 42% said they were somewhat interested. The majority, 59%, got their state news from television, while only 33% read newspapers for their state news. Heavier newspaper readers were more likely than lighter readers to be interested in state government news, while there was no difference in interest between lighter and heavier television viewers. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED203329

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
[X] This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
[ ] Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

SOURCES FOR STATE GOVERNMENT NEWS*

by

Rick Ducey and Joey Reagan

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Rick Ducey
Joey Reagan
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented to the Radio-TV Journalism Division, Association for Education in Journalism, Annual Convention, Michigan State University, East Lansing, August 1981. Both authors are candidates for the Ph.D. in Mass Media at Michigan State University. Mr. Reagan is also an Instructor in Communication at the University of Michigan.

*This paper was selected as the second place winner in the student competition.

CS206352

Division Code
RTVJ

SOURCES FOR STATE GOVERNMENT NEWS*

by

Rick Ducey and Joey Reagan

Presented to the Radio-TV Journalism Division, Association for Education in Journalism, Annual Convention, Michigan State University, East Lansing, August 1981. Both authors are condidates for the Ph.D. in Mass Media at Michigan State University. Mr. Reagan is also an Instructor in Communication at the University of Michigan.

*This paper was selected as the second place winner in the student competition.

ABSTRACT

Television has been found to be the most believable medium as well as the most mentioned source of news about "What's going on in the world." While some studies have assessed the sources for local news, few have focused their attention on state news.

The purpose of this study was to assess the sources used by a metropolitan population for news about state government. In addition, demographic, interest in state government news, and media use variables were examined to see if differences in these variables relate to differences in selection of news source.

The interest in state government news in this study was higher than the interest in news found in other studies. Television was found to be the major source, even across media use and demographic subgroups. However, those interested in state news are more likely to select newspaper as a source, than those not interested. There was no difference between categories of interest and selection of TV as a source.

This study and others suggest additional research--comparing various geographic areas (both urban and rural) as well as other predictors of state news sources such as demographics and interest.

Television continues to be self-described as the most believeable news medium as well as the major source of news. From the 1960s to the present television has been rated as more believeable and the major source of both national and local news even when the comparison was made at the local level, i.e., comparing local television newscasts with the local daily newspaper.[1]

Since 1961 the Roper Organization has found television to be the most believeable medium[2] and since 1963 found television to be the most mentioned source of news about "what's going on in the world".[3]

While some studies have addressed the sources for local news, few have focused their attention on state news. Levy, for example, found that TV or both TV and newspapers were the principal sources for national and international news, while the newspaper far surpassed TV as the source of local news, but no assessment was made of sources of state news.[4]

Roper Organization studies did ask respondents their sources for information about statewide elections, candidates and issues. In 1976 Roper found that television was still in first place, reported by 50% or more respondents as their source of information about state candidates, issues or elections, while newspapers were cited by only 35%, and other sources (including radio, magazines and other people) were reported by less than ten percent.[5]

Two questions arise: 1) since Roper only asked about elections, would the reports of news sources vary if respondents were asked about coverage of state government rather than just elections? and 2) since Roper's was a national study would the results vary if a local study were conducted? Zenaty and Reagan, for example, found that news credibility varied considerably in their local studies from Roper national studies, the local results varying by ten percent above or below Roper's national results.[6]

The purpose of this study, then, was to assess the sources used by a metropolitan population for news about state government. In addition, demographic, interest in state government news, and media use variables are examined to see if differences in these variables relate to differences in selection of news sources.

METHOD

A cross-sectional survey was conducted in the Lansing, Michigan area with a systematic random sample of 947 telephone numbers selected from the most recent Lansing Area telephone directory. Interviews were conducted with 714 respondents between 6:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., Tuesday through Thursday, May 13-15, 1980.[7]

The sample was composed of 43.0% male, 54.6% married, 36.3% with children living at home, 38.4% with at least a college degree, and 52.7% having household incomes over $20,000. The average age of a respondent was 40.4 years.

In addition to demographic questions, respondents were asked how many hours of television they watched on the previous day and how much time (in minutes) they spent reading a newspaper on the previous day.

To assess interest in news about state government respondents were asked, "How interested are you in news about state government? Would you say you are interested, somewhat interested or not interested in state government news?"

To find out the sources for state government news respondents were asked the unaided question, "Where do you get your news about things that happen in the state government?" Multiple responses to this question were allowed.

Comparisons were made among dichotomous media use and demographic categories. TV use, newspaper use, education and income were split as close to the median as possible. The following dichotomies were used: TV use (2 hours or less/over 2 hours); newspaper use (45 minutes or less/more than 45 minutes); Age (35 years or less/over 35 years); Education (some college or less/college degree or more);

income ($20,000 or less/more than $20,000); marital status (married/single); parental status (children living at home/none at home); and gender (male/female).

Where comparisons were made across three subgroups a "chi-square test" was used.[8] Where percentages between two groups were compared the "difference - of-proportions test" was used.[9]

RESULTS

Television was used an average of 3.02 hours and newspapers an average of fifty-two minutes on the previous day.

When asked how interested in state government news they were, 47.4% said they were interested, 42.8% were somewhat interested and 9.7% were not interested at all.

The following sources for state government news were selected by respondents (multiple responses were allowed): newspaper - 33.3%, television - 59.1%, radio - 9.5%, other people - 1.8%, and other sources - 6.3%.[10]

Relation of Interest to Source. Table one compares degrees of interest in state government news with respondents' selection of sources of such news. Those who are interested or somewhat interested in news about state government are more likely to use the newspaper as a source than those not interested. However, interest does not relate to selection of either TV or radio as sources with similar proportions of each category of interest selecting TV or radio as a source of state government news.

- -

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

- -

Media Use and Interest. Heavier users of newspaper are more likely than lighter users to be interested in news about state government. There is no difference in interest between lighter and heavier users of TV (See Table 2).

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Demographics and Interest. The demographic breakdowns are also presented in Table 2. Older, married, higher educated and higher income persons are more likely to be interested in news about state government than are younger, single persons with lower income and education. There was no difference for gender or parental status.

Media Use and Source. These results are presented in Table 3. Heavier newspaper users were more likely than lighter users to select newspapers as a source. Heavier TV users were more likely to select TV as a source. The converse was not true, i.e., lighter users of TV were no more likely to use newspapers as a source and lighter users of newspapers were not more likely to select TV as a source.

Even though heavier users of newpapers were more likely than lighter users to select newspapers as a source, regardless of media use, television was selected most often as a source of state government news.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Demographics and Source. The demographic results are presented in Table 3. Higher educated males are more likely than females or those with lower education to select newspapers as a source of state government news. Younger, lower educated, lower income females are more likely than their counterparts to select TV as a source. None of the other comparisons are significant.

Again, regardless of the comparison, within any demographic subcategory television is the most selected source of state government news. The closest is education where among higher educated persons only a few percent more select TV as a source.

DISCUSSION

The interest in state government news expressed in the Lansing area was higher than that found by Jennings and Ziegler in their analysis of national data.[11] Even though limiting their analysis to those interested in public affairs in general, they found that 37% paid a great deal of attention to state politics and 12% paid "not much" attention.[12] The present study found about 47% interested and less than 10% not interested at all - and this of the total population which included those who might not be interested in public affairs. Of course, there are explanations: Jennings and Ziegler analyzed data collected twelve years before the present study (in 1968); interest in state politics with the emergence of state tax issues may have generally increased; and Lansing is a state capital which may add to interest in state politics. Regardless of the difference in the studies, both show that there is an interest in state government news, and would then encourage further research in use of and sources for such news.

Like other studies on news sources, this study found that television is reported by more respondents as a source of state government news. Again, regardless of the nature of the news - national, local or state - television is the major source, even when looking at media use and demographic subgroups. However, like some studies of local news, there is considerable variation between local ratings of sources and national ratings. The present study found that nine percent more respondents selected TV as a source than in the Roper national study, and only slightly fewer (3%) selected newspapers. This difference raises the question: why are there such differences? Does local TV coverage vary in quality or quantity of state government news from geographic locale to locale? Does the local newspaper coverage vary noticeably from locale to locale? If so, how does variance in such coverage relate to differences in the use of these media as sources?

The finding that those interested in state news are more likely to select a newspaper as a source than are those not interested needs further examination. Does reporting of state news by the newspaper pique the interest of those already reading, or do those who have a keen interest search out the newspaper specifically as a source?

There was no difference between categories of interest and their selection of TV as a source. Most people use television regardless of their interest, but do those with a keener interest also use newspapers? If this is so then the fact that TV is reported as the major source loses some of its meaning. With a certain minimal amount of interest TV offers some information about state government. However, those wanting additional information may have to turn to another source - in this case, newspapers.

In general, the demographic results are similar to those found in studies of news credibility. Carter and Greenberg found that males were more likely than females to prefer newspapers while females were more likely to prefer TV.[13] Younger and less educated preferred TV while older more educated respondents were more likely than their counterparts to prefer newspaper. Greenberg found the same results in a later study.[14] The present study also found that lower educated females were more likely to select TV as a source. In addition, those with lower income were also more likely to select TV. Interestingly, this study found that older persons were more likely to select TV. Perhaps, as the "TV generation" heads toward middle-age the selection of TV as a source also follows.

Based on the fact that several studies have found high interest in state government news and that very few explored uses for and sources for such news, additional research is suggested. This research should be carried out in various geographic areas of the country, both urban and rural, and should concentrate on predicting the selection of a source through an examination of the reasons for selecting a particular news source.

NOTES

1. See, for example: Richard F. Carter and Bradley S. Greenberg, "Newspapers or Television: Which Do You Believe?" Journalism Quarterly, 42:29-34 (Winter, 1965). Bradley S. Greenberg, "Media Use and Believability: Some Multiple Correlates," Journalism Quarterly, 43:655-70 (Winter, 1966). Harvey K. Jacobson, "Mass Media Believability: A Study of Receiver Judgments." Journalism Quarterly 46:20-28 (Spring, 1969), Burns W. Roper. Changing Public Attitudes Toward Television and Other Mass Media 1959-1976 (New York: Television Information Office, May 1977). Bruce H. Westley and Werner J. Severin, "Some Correlates of Media Credibility." Journalism Quarterly, 41:325-35 (Summer, 1964). John D. Abel and Michael O. Wirth. "Newspaper vs. TV Credibility for Local News" Journalsim Quarterly, 54:371-75 (Summer, 1977). Joey Reagan and Jayne Zenaty, "Local News Credibility: Newspapers vs. TV Revisited," Journalism Quarterly, 56:186-72 (Spring 1979). Jayne W. Zenaty and Joey Reagan, "Apples and Oranges: The Credibility of Local Television and Newspaper News Sources," paper presented to the Speech Communication Association, San Antonio, November 1979. James B. Lemmert, "News Media Competition Under Conditions Favorable to Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, 47:272-80 (Summer 1970). Guido H. Stempel III, "Effects on Performance of a Cross Media Monoploy," Journalism Monographs, 29 (June 1973).

2. Roper, op cit., p. 4.

3. Ibid. p. 3.

4. Mark R. Levy, "The Audience Experience with Television News," Journalism Monographs, 9 (April 1978).

5 Roper, op cit., pp. 8-10

6. Zenaty and Reagan, op cit. pp. 12-13.

7. There were 714 completed interviews, 126 refused to participate, 93 numbers were disconnected or business numbers, and the remainder (14) were not contacted. Eliminating the disconnect and business numbers produces an effective completion rate of 83.6%. The refusal rate was 14.8%.

8. Sidney Siegel, Nonparametric Statistics: For the Behavioral Sciences (New York McGraw-Hill, 1956), pp. 175-179.

9. Hubert M. Blalock, Social Statistics (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979),pp.232-234.

10. "Other people" and "other sources" were eliminated from further analyses because of their small Ns.

11. M. Kent Jennings and Harmon Ziegler, "The Salience of American State Politics," American Political Science Review 64:523-535 (June 1970).

12. Ibid, p. 526.

13. Carter and Greenberg, op. cit., p. 33.

14. Greenberg, op. cit., pp. 667-670.

Table 1

The relation of Interest in State Government News to Source of State News

		Source			
		Newspaper	TV	Radio	(n)
Interest in State Government News:	Interested	30.8%	58.7%	10.5%	(334)
	Somewhat	38.2	58.1	8.6	(301)
	Not	22.0	61.8	8.9	(68)
	χ^2	9.92	<1	<1	
	p	<.01	ns	ns	

NOTE: Percentages total to greater than 100 because of multiple response.

Table 2

The Relation of Media Use and Demographics to Interest in State Government News

	Interested	
	%	(n)
TV use: 2 hrs -	48.3	(292)
2 hrs. +	49.9	(274)
Newspaper Use:		
45 mins. -	44.9*	(314)
46 mins. +	58.2	(237)
Age: 35 -	34.8**	(353)
36 +	60.1	(336)
Married	54.7**	(375)
Single	38.5	(314)
Children at home	52.1	(240)
No children	46.3	(428)
Some College -	43.5*	(425)
College degree +	54.1	(268)
Income: $20,000 -	42.8	(362)
$20,001 +	53.3	(274)
Male	50.0	(270)
Female	51.3	(359)

*$p < .01$
**$p < .001$

Table 3

The Relation of Media Use and Demographics to Source of State Government News

	Source			
	Newspaper	TV	Radio	(n)
Tv Use: 2hrs. -	34.6%	55.3%***	9.5%	(295)
2hrs.+	29.2	69.8	6.8	(281)
Newspaper Use:				
45 min. -	33.2**	54.0	9.5	(328)
46 min. +	45.2	51.9	5.9	(239)
Age: 35 -	33.1	50.3***	10.8	(360)
36 +	35.1	67.8	8.3	(339)
Married	32.9	59.0	10.4	(383)
Single	34.4	57.7	8.2	(317)
Children at home	33.7	56.5	10.6	(246)
No children	32.3	61.9	8.6	(431)
Some College -	28.6***	67.7***	8.5	(433)
College degree +	41.5	45.2	11.5	(270)
Income: $20,000 -	35.8	64.0**	8.9	(369)
$20,001 +	31.9	52.2	10.1	(276)
Male	40.0*	53.1**	9.7	(273)
Female	31.8	64.6	9.9	(362)

NOTE: Percentages may total across to more than 100 due to multiple response.

* $p<.05$
** $p<.01$
*** $p<.001$